

VZCZCXRO3852
RR RUEHROV
DE RUEHDJ #1419/01 3570952
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 230952Z DEC 09
FM AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1166
INFO IGAD COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DJIBOUTI 001419

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS
DEPARTMENT FOR AF/E

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/12/23
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [DJ](#)
SUBJECT: OPPOSITION FIGURES PREPARE FOR 2011 ELECTIONS

REF: 09 DJIBOUTI 1405; 09 DJIBOUTI 148; 09 DJIBOUTI 1277

CLASSIFIED BY: J. Swan, Ambassador; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY. Two minor political figures have now declared their intention to run as candidates in 2011 presidential elections: Aden Robleh Awaleh of the National Democratic Party (PND), nominally an ally of the ruling party (ref A), and Mohamed Daoud Chehem of the unaffiliated Djiboutian Party for Development (PDD). The Republican Alliance for Democracy (ARD) a member an opposition grouping that boycotted elections in 2005 and 2006, plans to hold a party congress in early 2010 to finalize its positions, but continues to endorse a long-reiterated list of pre-conditions for participation in 2011. While it is still early to handicap electoral prospects for 2011, none of the minor opposition figures who have emerged to date appear to have the party program, network, resources, or uncontested ethnic base to mount a convincing challenge to President Guelleh if-as seems imminent-the constitution is amended to permit him to run for a third term. END SUMMARY.

PND: NEXT MOVES AFTER DECLARING CANDIDACY

12. (C) Ambassador met December 23 with PND President Aden Robleh Awaleh. Awaleh told Ambassador that the PND's recent party congress (ref A), which he described as "very well attended," had given him the party's blessing to oppose a third mandate for Guelleh and run as a candidate himself, but that it was now his own responsibility to decide how to implement these directives. Awaleh said that his party stood by the call for a "national conference" on the way forward to 2011, but agreed with Ambassador's suggestion that framing such a discussion as a "national consultation" might attract more support by avoiding echoes of the "sovereign national conference" phenomenon of the early 1990s.

13. (C) Awaleh characterized the ruling UMP ("Union for a Presidential Majority") coalition as a loose "political partnership" rather than a true "union of parties," and said that he had not met privately with President Guelleh or the President's RPP ("People's Rally for Progress") party for over nine months. He had, however, been discussing with the (former opposition) ruling-coalition party FRUD ("Front for the Restoration of Democracy and Unity"), and suggested that the PND and FRUD saw eye-to-eye on several points, including the addition of a senate via constitutional amendment. (COMMENT. Awaleh described the potential role of such as senate as "guarding the roots" of Djibouti, and commented that it could be constituted from the Afar and Issa ethnic communities. Other groups-such as Djiboutians of Yemeni origin, or the Somali Issacks, were noticeably left out.

Awaleh openly acknowledged that the PND is an majority ethnic-Issa party, and criticized President Guelleh for selling Djiboutian land (and interests) to foreigners from Yemen and the Gulf states. END COMMENT.)

14. (C) Awaleh agreed with Ambassador that it was important for 2011 elections to be free, fair, and transparent, and said that if the conditions were not right for a free election, he would withdraw his candidacy. "There have never been free elections in Djibouti," he commented. Awaleh said that he advocated for the reinforcement of an independent national election commission, and strengthened mechanisms to prevent people from voting at multiple polling stations. Awaleh, who described himself as the "architect" of Djiboutian independence, told Ambassador that his family felt threatened in their business pursuits after the PND congress, and that he himself would not be surprised to "end up in prison."

PDD: FIRST TO DECLARE 2011 CANDIDACY,
BUT STILL WORKING ON A PLATFORM
DJIBOUTI 00001419 002 OF 003

15. (C) Ambassador and PolOff met December 21 with PDD President Mohamed Daoud Chehem. In March 2009, Chehem became the first candidate to declare he would stand for 2011 presidential elections. Chehem's PDD had contested 2003 legislative elections as part of the opposition grouping UAD ("Union for a Democratic Alternation"), but left the UAD when it decided to boycott 2005 presidential elections. Chehem declared his own candidacy for the 2005 elections in September 2004, but withdrew from the race in March 2005, he told Ambassador, after realizing that he had not left himself enough time to organize a campaign. To avoid repeating this mistake he had been careful to declare his 2011 candidacy early. In addition, Chehem told Ambassador, he had not wanted to "wait" to announce his own candidacy until President Guelleh publicly declares whether he will or will not seek a third mandate. The PDD continued to oppose a constitutional amendment allowing President Guelleh to seek a third term in office. "If we mobilize the population," he said, "President Guelleh will bow out."

16. (C) Chehem said that the PDD was currently looking for a headquarters building, and was planning to hold a party congress in May. When pressed by Ambassador, Chehem said that the PDD was currently developing a policy platform, which would be publicized after the May party congress. He noted that as part of its policy, although not necessarily as part of its public platform, the PDD would invite the U.S. to establish a military base in northern Djibouti. Regarding campaign strategies, Chehem said that as most of the PDD's supporters did not read or write, the party would mainly rely on extensive campaign visits throughout the country, but would also establish a newspaper. Chehem, an ethnic Afar, stressed that PDD party leadership included representatives from all of Djibouti's ethnic communities, including a Gadaboursi Vice-President. On election procedures, Chehem said that the PDD would demand an independent electoral commission, and would insist on the rights of party observers to obtain a copy of the summary voting results of each polling station.

17. (C) Chehem accused President Guelleh of instigating and allowing widespread corruption and nepotism throughout the GODJ, calling him "more of a businessman than a statesman." Guelleh, Chehem said,

was also increasingly facing problems even within his own Issa community. There were rumors, he said, that exiled Issa/Odagob businessman Abdourahman Mohamed Mahamoud Boreh (ref B) was funding ethnic Issa/Odagob PND President Aden Robleh Awaleh, who is part of the ruling UMP ("Union for a Presidential Majority") coalition but recently declared his own independent candidacy for 2011 (ref A). In addition, Chehem claimed, Odagob elements of the army were becoming discontented. Furthermore, Chehem told Ambassador, Guelleh's relationship with the Issa community continued to be strained by public perceptions of the considerable power wielded by the First Lady, an ethnic Issack.

18. (SBU) BIO NOTE ON MOHAMED DAOUD CHEHEM. Chehem is an ethnic Afar, and originally from the northern town of Tadjourah. He is married to an ethnic Issa/Fourlaba. He studied mathematics in France (1976-1977), and was named Chief of Staff to the Prime Minister (1978) shortly after Djiboutian independence. He worked in various positions at the Ministry of Finance, including as Director of Finance (1987-1991). In January 1991, he was arrested, tried for involvement in a plot against state security, and sentenced to five years in prison. He was pardoned in 1993. Chehem founded the PDD in 2002. END BIO NOTE.

ARD: PARTY CONGRESS SET FOR EARLY 2010

19. (C) PolOff met December 21 with ARD Secretary-General Adan Mohamed Abdou. (NOTE. The ARD is a member of the three-party UAD opposition grouping. Separately, Abdou is also a prominent

DJIBOUTI 00001419 003 OF 003

Djiboutian union leader. END NOTE.) Abdou said that the ARD would hold its party congress in January or February, and would set the date in early January. At the last ARD congress, held in 2006, one-third of ARD members had voted to "pick up arms again" against the government. While this question was bound to come up again during the 2010 congress, Abdou said that he believed the "majority will still be against the use of force." (NOTE. The GODJ and the ethnic-Afar FRUD ("Front for the Restoration of Democracy and Unity") clashed during the civil conflicts of the 1990s, which ended with the signature of a peace accord in 2001. END NOTE.) Abdou said that there were already small groups of rebels active in northern Djibouti; however, the problem was not widespread. In addition, there was an "informal understanding" of non-confrontation between such groups and Djiboutian armed forces, who were "no longer interested in war."

110. (C) Abdou said that the ARD had annex offices in Tadjourah, Obock, and Dikhil, as well as three annex offices in Djibouti City. He said that the ARD continued to post editions of its newsletter "La Realite" online, after ceasing paper publication in 2005. The party was also actively working to mobilize the Djiboutian diaspora, and had named representatives in France, Switzerland, and London. In Djibouti, the ARD had numerous members who "secretly" supported the party and paid dues, but were loath to publicly and formally declare their membership, for fear of repercussions in business or employment. In recent years, Abdou claimed, many former FRUD supporters had shifted their allegiance to the ARD. On outreach to the international community, Abdou said that ordinary Djiboutians perceived that the international community was more concerned with following their own interests in Djibouti than in pushing for human rights or democratic reform.

¶11. (C) Abdou said that the UAD opposition grouping remained steadfast in its opposition to a constitutional amendment allowing President Guelleh to run for a third term in office, and "encouraged" the candidacy of PND President Aden Robleh Awaleh, as well as Awaleh's proposal that there be a national multi-party conference on 2011 elections. Above and beyond Awaleh's proposal for an all-inclusive national conference, Abdou said, the UAD had called for the formation of a transitional government of national unity. The UAD also continued to demand the fulfillment of a certain number of pre-conditions for participation in 2011 elections (ref C). Abdou especially bemoaned the difficulty of financing an electoral campaign, and accused the ruling party of using state resources to run its own campaign.

COMMENT

¶12. (C) Given recent indications (septel) that the FRUD-perhaps at one time the most influential opposition party, and now the President's most important coalition ally-will support a constitutional amendment, the opposition parties may have even less hope of gaining traction in their quest to block a third Guelleh term. The FRUD has expressed interest in inviting opposition parties to participate in national discussions on constitutional reform, and while the UAD and PDD may be unlikely to change their positions on a constitutional amendment, they may accept a seat-if offered one-at the negotiation table. In discussions with the GODJ, the ruling coalition, and opposition parties, post will continue to stress that allowing open and diverse participation in the national political debate can help contribute to the transparency and legitimacy of 2011 elections. END COMMENT.
SWAN